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ABSTRACT

In an effort to reveal how closely cheating at community colleges resembles that at four-year colleges in both kind and quantity, a survey similar to the one used by Donald L. McCabe for university students was administered to 298 students at Raritan Valley Community College. A summary of the results are included in this report. The survey data suggests that students at Raritan are as likely to cheat and plagiarize, if not more so, as students at four-year colleges. They are more likely to help others cheat and less likely to report cheating committed by other students. They also are more likely to feel that cheating occurs often or very often at their campus. The reasons for these attitudes and behaviors may in part be suggested by their acceptance of cheating in society at large. What is not known is whether Raritan is representative of community colleges, which would imply that more cheating and plagiarism occurs at two-year than four-year colleges. If this were to be true, it suggests a possible relationship between the quality of student work and motivation and a willingness to cheat or accept cheating. Another area that deserves further scrutiny is the large discrepancy between the amount of cheating committed or seen by students at Raritan compared to that observed by faculty, who indicate that cheating is not an issue of great concern. (VWC)

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Cheating And Its Vicissitudes

Academic Dishonesty at Raritan Valley

A Preliminary Report

M L Cozin
Raritan Valley Community College
May 1999

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Comprehensive surveys completed by McCabe and others during the past decade indicates that student cheating at American colleges is widespread and takes a variety of forms (McCabe and Trevino, 1996). These surveys indicate that approximately 50% of students have copied from others during an exam, that a third of students have helped other students cheat on an exam, a fourth have used crib notes during an exam, a fourth have plagiarized, and nearly a third have falsified a bibliography. In addition, one out of seven students have handed in work written by another student and claimed it as their own, and half have collaborated on projects when the instructor had specified that only individual work was acceptable.

Cheating at Raritan Valley Community College

Although a large percentage of students attending college do so at community colleges, few studies of academic dishonesty report any findings from this sector. There are questions therefore, as to how closely cheating at community colleges resembles that at four year colleges in both kind and quantity. In an effort to reveal this information, a survey similar to the one used by McCabe was administered to 298 students at Raritan Valley Community College in early December 1998. A summary of the results are indicated on the survey itself (see pages 7-12). Sixty nine percent of students at Raritan completing the survey were nearing the end of their first semester of college.

The survey indicates that actions traditionally associated as 'classical cheating' – copying from another student on an exam with or without their compliance, was reported to have been committed at least once by 29% of Raritan Valley students. Twenty seven

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percent of students reported having used crib notes during exams. Sixty two percent of students reported seeing another student cheat.

Variants of classical cheating were more common. For instance, forty one percent reported receiving questions or answers (or both) from someone who had already taken the exam. Thirty nine percent said they had helped another student to cheat on an exam.

Plagiarism and it's variants was, in most cases, as common as simple cheating. Twenty nine percent of students reported copying material from elsewhere and submitting it as their own work, while thirty one percent reported having falsified a bibliography. More than half of the students surveyed claimed to have copied some material without footnoting it. In perhaps the most heinous form of academic deceit, thirteen percent of students reported having turned in the work of others as their own, while its reciprocal- writing or providing a paper for another student was admitted to by sixteen percent of respondents.

Other sundry forms of academic dishonesty are evident in varying quantities. Thirty eight percent of students collaborated with others even when they knew the instructor wanted individual work. Eighteen percent of students reported either copying the computer work of someone else or falsifying lab or research data. For the most part all of these activities were viewed as cheating by students, although collaborating with others on assignments was not seen to be as serious a transgression as individual acts of academic dishonesty. For almost all forms of deceit students reported that they were 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to be caught.

A comparison of cheating at Raritan compared to data McCabe has summarized from his surveys of non honor code four year colleges is revealing. Raritan students

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believe cheating and plagiarism is more common on their campus compared to their counterparts at four year institutions. Thirty four percent of Raritan students felt cheating occurred often or very often at R.V.C.C. In comparison, only 20% of students at four year colleges felt that cheating occurred that often on their campuses. Thirty nine percent of Raritan students felt that plagiarism occurred often or fairly often compared to twenty eight percent of the four year college students surveyed by McCabe.

Raritan students also appear to be more likely to help other students cheat. Thirty seven percent said they would either give answers directly to a student who asked during an exam, or expose their answer to a similar request. A significantly lower percent (6%) of students at four year colleges said they would respond in similar fashion to a request for answers from a fellow student during an exam. Fewer Raritan students than those at four year colleges said they would report a student they observed cheating. Only five percent of Raritan students said they would do so, compared to fourteen of students at four year colleges.

Fewer Raritan students also view cheating to be categorically unacceptable. Only seventy-two percent agreed with the statement 'under no circumstances is cheating justified'. Eighty seven percent of four year college students agreed with the same statement.

Students at Raritan appear to be less concerned with cheating in society at large than those at four year colleges. Twenty six percent of Raritan students agreed with the statement 'Cheating is common in American society. It is an acceptable way to get ahead'. Only sixteen percent of students at four colleges agreed with the same statement. Only eighteen percent of Raritan agreed with the statement ' I am bothered by the

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cheating that goes on here' compared to thirty nine percent of students at four year colleges who responded to the same statement.

The Faculty View

A survey of Raritan Valley faculty experiences and perceptions of student cheating was completed during the second week of February 1999. Thirty six of the fifty eight faculty (62%) who received the survey completed it. Members of departments representing the English, Social Science, Humanities, Science, and Business faculty responded. They averaged approximately 15 years of experience at Raritan, 36% having labored for 21 years or more. Their responses are summarized on the attached faculty survey (pages 12-15). Several of the questions are identical or nearly identical to those on the student survey. The resulting responses allow for some direct comparisons between student and faculty perceptions to be offered.

Generally, cheating does not appear to be an issue of great concern to the faculty. A quarter of the faculty reported never having observed cheating, and only 17% reported having observed cheating 'several times or more'. Only 12% agreed with the statement 'cheating is a serious problem at Raritan'.

Students at Raritan may have taken notice of the faculty's lack of concern regarding cheating. Only twelve percent of Raritan students said the most likely outcome taken by a Raritan instructor in response to student cheating would be to fail them for the course. Seventeen percent of students surveyed by McCabe at four year colleges said that students caught cheating would receive a failing grade for the course.

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Although over 80% of the faculty said they were familiar with college policy on cheating and plagiarism and over 50% felt that the policy was fair, 50% rated the policy as less than effective and only 28% said they actually followed the policy when they observed cheating. For reasons yet to be fully determined the faculty do not seem to support the prescribed policy.

This lack of support of official Raritan policy was not directly addressed by the survey but informal discussions with faculty members are suggestive. Some faculty at Raritan told me that the administrative process that deals with academic dishonesty is overly bureaucratic and time consuming. In addition, faculty are unaccustomed to the lack of control they experience outside the classroom and sometimes uncomfortable and unwilling to participate in an administrative fact finding process. They would, they claim, prefer to spend their time in ways other than trying to prove a case of cheating they are certain to have occurred. Lastly, faculty sometimes feel that the administration is not always supportive of their charges against students, or harsh enough in sanctioning students determined to have cheated.

Summary

The survey data discussed above suggests (considering that 7 of 10 who responded were first semester students) that students at Raritan are as likely to cheat and plagiarize, if not more so, than students at four year colleges. They are more likely to help others cheat and less likely to report cheating committed by other students. The reasons for these attitudes and behaviors may in part be suggested by their acceptance of cheating in society at large. What is not known is whether Raritan is representative of

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community colleges, and therefore, whether more cheating and plagiarism occurs at two year than four year colleges. If this were to be true it suggests a possible relationship between the quality of student work and motivation and a willingness to cheat or accept cheating.

Another area that deserves further scrutiny is the large discrepancy between the amount of cheating committed or seen by students at Raritan compared to that observed by R.V.C.C. faculty. Is this discrepancy typical at community and four colleges, and if so, what accounts for these varied perspectives? Lastly, are there policies that are known to work at four year colleges in reducing academic dishonesty (e.g. honor codes) that could be implemented successfully at community colleges such as Raritan? These and other considerations suggested by the survey data are issues that need to be addressed.

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RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY SURVEY

SECTION I - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. **What was your status when you first enrolled at Raritan?**

   69% 1. First semester at any college or university (Please skip to question 3.)
   13% 2. Transferred to Raritan from another 2-year college
   13% 3. Transferred to Raritan from a 4-year college or university
   5% 4. Already had a college degree

2. **For how many semesters, including summers and this term, have you attended Raritan?**

   — Semesters

3. **What is your program of study here at Raritan?**

   _____

   Liberal Arts 34.3%
   Education 13.4%
   Criminal Justice 8.3%
   Business 7.4%
   Communications 4.6%
   other ~~27.4%~~
   Undecided 4.6%

4. **Are your Raritan courses this semester primarily**

   94% Daytime 6% Evening — Week-end

5. **Do you plan to transfer after leaving Raritan?** Yes 84% No 4% Undecided 12%

6. **What kind of occupation do you plan to enter?**

   Arts 10% Business 14% Education 28%
   Engineering/Science 7% Law 5% Medical/Allied Health 8%
   Public/Government Service 8% Technical 1% Undecided 18%
   other 1%

SECTION II - ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AT RARITAN

". **How frequently do you think the following occur at Raritan?**

	Never	Very seldom	Seldom	Often	Very often
Plagiarism on written assignments	4%	18%	39%	33%	6%
Cheating during tests or examinations	5%	23%	38%	28%	6%

8. **How often have you seen another student cheat during a test or exam at Raritan?**

   Never 42% Once 11% A few times 36% Several times 8% Many times 3%

9. **Have you ever reported another student for cheating?**

   Never 97% Once 2% A few times 1% Several times — Many times —

PLEASE TURN TO QUESTION 10

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10. **If someone asked you for help during a test or exam, what would you do?** (Please check one choice.)

		Friend
1. Give him/her the answer	8%	26%
2. Say nothing but expose your paper so he/she can copy the answer	19%	35%
3. Ignore or turn down the request	56%	27%
4. Express disapproval informally but not report him/her	14%	11%
5. Report him/her to the appropriate authorities	1%	–
6. Other _____	2%	1%

If it were a close friend who asked for help, what would you do? (Provide number from list above.) See above

11. **What would you do if you saw a student cheating on a major test or examination.** (Please check one choice.)

		Friend
1. Report him/her to the instructor, proctor, or appropriate authority	4%	1%
2. Ask the student to report himself/herself and report them if they fail to do so	2%	2%
3. Express disapproval informally to the student but not report him/her	17%	34%
4. Mention the incident to other students but not report it	20%	6%
5. Ignore the incident	56%	56%
6. Other _____	1%	1%

What would you do if the student you saw cheating were a close friend: (Provide number from list above.) See above

12. **How would you rate:**

	Very Low	Low	High	Very High
The competitiveness for grades at Raritan?	3%	50%	43%	4%
The pressure you feel for getting good grades?	2%	21%	56%	21%
Severity of penalties for cheating at Raritan?	8%	35%	45%	12%
Chances of getting caught cheating at Raritan?	14%	55%	25%	6%
The average student's understanding of Raritan's policies concerning student cheating?	30%	44%	23%	3%
The faculty's understanding of Raritan's policies concerning student cheating?	7%	23%	54%	16%
The faculty's support of these policies?	5%	32%	47%	16%
The effectiveness of these policies?	13%	43%	34%	10%

PLEASE TURN TO QUESTION 13

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13. Many factors may motivate an individual to do his or her academic work honestly. For each of the following items, please indicate its importance in your decisions to act honestly in your academic work at Raritan.

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Fairly Important	Very Important
My personal beliefs	3%	8%	26%	63%
Chance of getting caught	13%	14%	26%	47%
My school's policies on academic integrity	21%	31%	27%	21%
Penalties for cheating at Raritan	18%	20%	28%	34%
Respect for my teachers	11%	14%	33%	42%

14. **Many factors may motivate an individual to cheat or engage in questionable behaviors in his or her academic work on occasion. For each of the following items, please indicate its importance in any decisions you have made to engage in behaviors that might be considered cheating.**

	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Fairly Important	Very Important
The pressure to get good grades	13%	18%	27%	42%
The workload at Raritan	17%	32%	37%	14%
Others do it	73%	14%	10%	3%
Little penalty if caught	39%	36%	18%	7%
Little chance of getting caught	31%	35%	23%	11%
Getting behind in my work	16%	29%	38%	17%
Don't think what I did was wrong	39%	30%	18%	13%

15. **Which of the following measures is most likely to be taken by a professor at Raritan who learns of a student cheating on a major test or examination:** (Please check one choice.)

		Written
1 Probably nothing (easier; don't want to get involved, etc.)	2%	2%
2 Reprimand the student and warn him/her not to do it again	6%	7%
3 Make the student re-take the test or examination	9%	12%
3 Fail the student on the test or examination	58%	45%
4 Fail the student for the course	12%	18%
5 Report the student to the appropriate authority	10%	13%
6 Other (please specify) _____	3%	3%

Using the numbers above, please tell us what action you think a professor would take if he or she caught a student cheating on a major written assignment? See above

PLEASE TURN TO QUESTION 16

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16. **Which of the following disciplinary measures is most likely to be taken at Raritan if a student is convicted of cheating on a major test or examination: (Please check one choice.)**

		written
1. Reprimand the student and warn him/her not to do it again	1%	-
2. Make him/her re-take the exam or assignment	3%	5%
3. Make him/her fail the exam or written assignment	28%	33%
4. Make him/her fail the course	19%	16%
5. Put a written warning in file or place on probation	13%	11%
6. Suspend him/her from school	5%	9%
7. Expel him/her from school	9%	8%
8. Other (please specify) _____	<1%	<1%
9. Don't know	22%	18%

Using the numbers above, please tell us what action you think is most likely to be taken if a student is convicted of cheating on a major written assignment? See above

17. **How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?** (Check one choice on each line.)

	Agree strongly	Agree mildly	Not sure	Disagree mildly	Disagree strongly
Under no circumstances is cheating justified.	46%	26%	13%	12%	3%
Reporting someone for cheating is worse than cheating.	9%	19%	27%	24%	21%
Faculty members at Raritan show little uniformity in handling instances of cheating.	6%	15%	63%	8%	8%
Faculty members do not try very hard to catch cheaters.	8%	29%	42%	16%	5%
Cheating is a serious problem at Raritan.	2%	12%	60%	15%	11%
Honesty is desirable but not as important as classmate loyalty.	4%	24%	19%	32%	21%
I am bothered by the cheating that goes on here.	4%	14%	35%	22%	25%
Cheating is common in American society. It is an acceptable way to get ahead.	5%	21%	8%	18%	48%
The college experience should help students develop standards of personal ethical behavior.	44%	41%	10%	4%	1%
Raritan's judicial process is fair and impartial.	9%	16%	68%	5%	1%
Students at Raritan should be held responsible for monitoring the academic integrity of other students.	5%	13%	16%	26%	38%

PLEASE TURN TO QUESTION 18

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18. We would like to ask you some questions about specific behaviors that some people might consider cheating. Please remember that this survey is completely anonymous and there is no way that anyone can connect you with any of your answers. Please circle one response for each question, using the following scales.

cheating or more

yes

	Since coming to Raritan how often have you engaged in any of the following actions? (1 = Never, 2 = Once, 3 = A few times, 4 = Several times, 5 = Many times)	Are you likely to get caught if you do this? (1 = Very unlikely, 2 = Unlikely, 3 = Not sure, 4 = Likely, 5 = Very likely)	Which actions do you consider to be cheating? (1 = Not cheating, 2 = Trivial cheating, 3 = Serious cheating)
% Copying from another student during a test (or exam) without his or her knowing it.	1 2 3 4 5 1.49	1 2 3 4 5 2.71	1 2 3 2.51
% Copying from another student during a test with his or her knowledge.	1 2 3 4 5 1.54	1 2 3 4 5 2.78	1 2 3 2.49
% Using unpermitted crib notes (or cheat sheet) during a test.	1 2 3 4 5 1.43	1 2 3 4 5 2.97	1 2 3 2.58
% Getting questions or answers from someone who has already taken a test.	1 2 3 4 5 1.77	1 2 3 4 5 2.18	1 2 3 2.18
% Helping someone else cheat on a test.	1 2 3 4 5 1.68	1 2 3 4 5 2.82	1 2 3 2.34
% Cheating on a test in any other way.	1 2 3 4 5 1.40	1 2 3 4 5 2.84	1 2 3 2.41
% Seen another student cheating on a test.	1 2 3 4 5 2.34		
% Copying material, almost word for word, from any source and turning it in as your own work.	1 2 3 4 5 1.49	1 2 3 4 5 3.25	1 2 3 2.54
% Fabricating or falsifying a bibliography.	1 2 3 4 5 1.54	1 2 3 4 5 3.01	1 2 3 2.32
% Turning in work done by someone else.	1 2 3 4 5 1.23	1 2 3 4 5 2.96	1 2 3 2.63
% Receiving substantial, unpermitted help on an assignment.	1 2 3 4 5 1.42	1 2 3 4 5 2.45	1 2 3 1.97
% Working on an assignment with others when the instructor asked for individual work.	1 2 3 4 5 1.69	1 2 3 4 5 2.37	1 2 3 1.83
% Copying a few sentences of material without footnoting them in a paper.	1 2 3 4 5 2.04	1 2 3 4 5 2.67	1 2 3 2.11
% Writing or providing a paper for another student.	1 2 3 4 5 1.29	1 2 3 4 5 2.70	1 2 3 2.50
% In a course requiring computer work, copying a friend's program rather than doing your own.	1 2 3 4 5 1.31	1 2 3 4 5 2.75	1 2 3 2.48
% Falsifying lab or research data.	1 2 3 4 5 1.32	1 2 3 4 5 2.99	1 2 3 2.37

PLEASE TURN TO QUESTION 19

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19. **How likely is it that:**

	Very Unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Very Likely
you would report an incident of cheating that you observed?	64%	31%	5%	<1%
the typical student at Raritan would report such violations?	50%	44%	6%	<1%
a student would report a close friend?	88%	10%	1%	<1%

SECTION III - PERSONAL DATA

20. **Please provide the following information about yourself. It will be used to help us analyze the overall results of this survey. We remind you that all individual information is completely anonymous.**

Are you: Female 64% Male 36%

What is your estimated GPA or grade point average? 2.95

21. **When you were in high school how often:**

	Never	Once	A few times	Several times	Many times
Did the typical student cheat on a major written assignment	4%	9%	44%	28%	15%
Did you cheat on a major written assignment in any way	39%	12%	34%	11%	4%
Did the typical student cheat on a test or exam	4%	9%	39%	28%	20%
Did you cheat on a test or exam	29%	14%	39%	13%	5%

22. **What was your grade average in high school:** (Please circle your answer below.)

A A- B+ B B- C+ C C- D+ or lower Mean = 4.41

23. **How does the level of test/exam cheating at Raritan compare to the level of cheating at your high school:**

Much higher in high school 29% Higher in high school 37% About the same 22%

Lower in high school 8% Much lower in high school 4%

24. **Please use this space for any comments you care to make or if there is any thing else you would like to tell us about the topic of cheating in college.**

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.

RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY SURVEY
FACULTY RESPONSE

How many years have you taught at Raritan?

0% 1-5
0% 6-10
17% 11-15
17% 16-20
67% 21+

Which department are you in?

_____

ow frequently do you think the following occur at Raritan?

	Never	Very seldom	Seldom	Often	Very often
Plagiarism on written assignments	0%	17%	25%	53%	6%
Cheating during tests or examinations	0%	34%	51%	14%	0%

How often have you seen a student cheat during a test or exam at Raritan?

Never 25% Once 16% A few times 42% Several times 17% Many times 0%

Have you ever reported a student for cheating?

Never 46% Once 17% A few times 23% Several times 14% Many times 0%

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6. **How would you rate:**

	Very Low	Low	High	Very High
The competitiveness for grades at Raritan?	6%	53%	32%	6%
The pressure students feel for getting good grades?	3%	38%	47%	9%
Severity of penalties for cheating at Raritan?	14%	57%	26%	0%
Chances of getting caught cheating at Raritan?	13%	53%	34%	0%
The average student's understanding of Raritan's policies concerning student cheating?	39%	44%	17%	0%
The faculty's understanding of Raritan's policies concerning student cheating?	9%	50%	41%	0%
The faculty's support of these policies?	9%	42%	45%	3%
The effectiveness of these policies?	6%	58%	35%	0%

7. **Which of the following measures is most likely to be taken by a professor at Raritan who learns of a student cheating on a major test or examination:** (Please check one choice.)

1 Probably nothing (easier; don't want to get involved; etc.)	2%	6%
2 Reprimand the student and warn him/her not to do it again	17%	6%
3 Make the student re-take the test or examination	7%	15%
4 Fail the student on the test or examination	50%	39%
5 Fail the student for the course	7%	9%
6 Report the student to the appropriate authority	17%	18%
7 Other (please specify) _____		

Using the numbers above, please tell us what action you think a professor would take if he or she caught a student cheating on a major written assignment? ____

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8. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (Check one choice on each line.)

	Agree strongly	Agree mildly	Not sure	Disagree mildly	Disagree strongly
Under no circumstances is cheating justified.	97%	0%	3%	0%	0%
Reporting someone for cheating is worse than cheating.	0%	6%	3%	3%	88%
Faculty members at Raritan show little uniformity in handling instances of cheating.	14%	26%	60%	0%	0%
Faculty members do not try very hard to catch cheaters.	3%	19%	53%	16%	8%
Cheating is a serious problem at Raritan.	6%	6%	53%	26%	9%
Honesty is desirable but not as important as classmate loyalty.	0%	3%	0%	12%	84%
I am bothered by the cheating that goes on here.	10%	23%	26%	23%	19%
Cheating is an acceptable way to get ahead in American society.	6%	11%	3%	11%	69%
The college experience should help students develop standards of personal ethical behavior.	83%	14%	0%	0%	3%
Raritan's judicial process is fair and impartial.	21%	32%	44%	3%	0%
Students at Raritan should be held responsible for monitoring the academic integrity of other students.	12%	35%	26%	12%	15%

9. **How often have you seen a student cheat during a test or exam at Raritan?**

Never 18% Once 24% A few times 48% Several times 9% Many times 0%

10. **Are you familiar with the college policy on cheating, plagiarism and behaviors which violate academic integrity?**

6% no
91% yes
23% sort of

11. **On occasions when you observed cheating on an exam, what have you done?**

25% Followed college policy on student cheating
23% Expressed disapproval informally to the student
44% Gave student a failing grade on exam
3% Ignored the incident
3% Other –please describe below

_____
_____
_____

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12. **On occasions when you followed official college procedures and reported a student for cheating or plagiarism how was it resolved and were you pleased with the resolution**

_____

_____

_____

13. **Compared to area high schools. students at Raritan are**

28% less likely to cheat and plagiarize

6% more likely to cheat and plagiarize

66% cheat and plagiarize about the same amount

14. **What do you do. if anything. to reduce cheating and plagiarism in your classes?**

_____

_____

_____

_____

In the space below please elaborate or comment on any of the above questions or on other issues regarding cheating/academic integrity at R.V.C.C.

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References

McCabe, Donald L., and Trevino, Linda K. "What We Know About Cheating In College". Change (January/February 1996) 29-33.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance provided by Professor Donald L. McCabe. Professor McCabe generously allowed the use of his questionnaire as well as providing (in a personal communication) summary data from non-honor code four year colleges.